

Succinct equals success

One of the hardest things to do is to get your message across in a short period of time. An anecdote that I have heard several times which may be true or not is told about a young staffer in the White House of former president who met the president every day on the elevator down to his office. In this short 30 second ride, the staffer was to brief the president every day on the goings on in South America. Imagine how long it took this person every day to prepare for his thirty seconds. It reminds us of the opening of a letter from Blaise Pascal to a friend, "I'm sorry I wrote you such a long letter; I didn't have time to write a short one."

Of all your presentations, perhaps the most important, and the one you should spend the most time and care on is what I call the "elevator speech". This is short, thirty second or so summary of what you are all about at the moment.

What should it consist of? That depends on your situation now. If you are currently tasked with an important project in your organization; you should take some time to craft an elevator speech about it.

If you are in a search mode, you should spend some time crafting your elevator speech about your career and where you want to go.

Finally, if you want to go in different direction in your current position or want to snag new responsibilities, you should work on your elevator speech for that.

What constitutes a good elevator speech? It is a short summary that details exactly what you are about in approximately three declarative sentences taking about thirty seconds.

It should be delivered in a natural, conversant tone, and not feel forced or coercive.

Your elevator speech is like a resume in the sense that it is a hook, not a solution. Your resume is designed to get an interview, which is designed to get you an offer, which starts the negotiation process.

In the same way, an elevator speech is a hook that is designed to get to the next step in a networking mode that may lead to an in-depth conversation.

Deftness of touch and awareness of the surroundings and receptivity are the keys to hitting home with a good elevator speech.

You would not want to tell your CEO about a project idea if there are rivals around. You would not want to announce you are in search mode in a coffee shop that you know your boss frequents.

This happened in an organization I was working in. Two employees were having coffee in a restaurant discussing leaving while unknowingly in booth beside their boss!

Next week we will get more specific about crafting your elevator speech. For now, think about what you would say to the president if you had thirty seconds!